

Media Release

The Hon Lisa Neville MP

Minister for the Coordination of Environment, Land, Water, and Planning – COVID-19
Minister for Police and Emergency Services
Minister for Water



Thursday, 13 August 2020

DELIVERING FOR BASIN WATER USERS

The Victorian Government is improving how water is delivered through our rivers and working to ensure irrigators in the Goulburn and Murray systems can access water when they need it.

Minister for Water Lisa Neville today announced that the river operator – the Murray-Darling Basin Authority (MDBA) – had agreed to aim for Goulburn to Murray inter-valley trade deliveries of a maximum of 40 gigalitres a month or less over summer and autumn to stop further environmental damage to the Goulburn River.

With 40 gigalitres a month in the Goulburn, the MDBA has said there is no indication that a shortfall will occur in the coming year. The MDBA's Annual Operating Outlook indicates this can be achieved through management of the system and use of tributaries such as the Murrumbidgee.

Minister Neville welcomed the MDBA Outlook and said Victoria would do all it could to guarantee no shortfall for irrigators in the Lower Murray or elsewhere in the system while still achieving flows that protect our Rivers.

The Outlook shows better environmental outcomes can be achieved without increased risk for irrigators by making strategic decisions about the way the rivers are operated, the timing of flows and how water is delivered.

The Victorian Government will not make or support any decisions that increased deliverability risk for current entitlement holders.

In addition to the new flow regime the Government is reviewing the rules that manage the trade of water from the Goulburn to the Murray and has released a summary of the initial community consultation.

In response to community feedback and acknowledging the impacts of coronavirus, the implementation of new trade rules will be delayed until the start of the 2021-22 irrigation season, providing irrigators with more time for consultation and to plan for any long term-changes.

To provide certainty for water users this irrigation season, the 2019 interim trade measures designed to protect deliverability and ensure a level playing field for irrigators will be extended, including the interim regulations for tagged accounts so that all trades are treated the same when limits are applied.

Victoria has already moved to address deliverability issues by limiting any approvals of new extraction licence in the lower Murray, securing agreement from New South Wales and South Australia to look more closely at their extractions and achieving agreement that the MDBA would do more work on deliverability risks.

Further consultation on options to change intervalley trade rules will begin later this year subject to public health requirements. The summary report of the initial community consultation is available at engage.vic.gov.au/goulburn-murray-trade-rule-review.

Quotes attributable to Minister for Water Lisa Neville

"My key priority will continue to be meeting the needs of irrigators while limiting environmental damage."

"With increasing demands and less inflows to the system – doing nothing is not an option. We are working with the MDBA to ensure irrigators receive their water while achieving lower flows in the Goulburn."

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